

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 OES-07 PM-05 EB-08 AID-05 CG-00
DOTE-00 DLOS-09 COME-00 EUR-12 NEA-10 AGRE-00
IO-13 EA-10 /090 W

-----067156 271012Z /10

R 270700Z APR 78

FM AMEMBASSY MONROVIA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9102

INFO AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN

AMEMBASSY ACCRA

AMEMBASSY ATHENS

AMEMBASSY BANJUL

AMEMBASSY BISSAU

AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST

AMCONSUL CASABLANCA

AMEMBASSY CONAKRY

AMEMBASSY COTONOU

AMEMBASSY DAKAR

AMEMBASSY FREETOWN

AMEMBASSY LAGOS

AMEMBASSY LOME

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY SEOUL

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

SECDEF WASHDC

CNO WASHDC

AMEMBASSY PRAIA POUCH

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 MONROVIA 3071

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: EFIS, EWWT, MARR, MASS, PARM, PBOR, PLOS, LI

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SUBJECT: ABILITY OF WEST AFRICAN COASTAL STATES TO PATROL OFF-
SHORE FISHERIES

REF: STATE 90967

1. THE FISHING INDUSTRY MAKES A SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION TO THE
LIBERIAN ECONOMY; AND, BEING THE MAJOR SOURCE OF PROTEIN

IN THE LIBERIAN DIET, IS IMPORTANT TO THE HEALTH OF LIBERIANS.
THE INDUSTRY ALSO PROVIDES EMPLOYMENT FOR SEVERAL HUNDRED PEOPLE.

2. MESURADO FISHING COMPANY, INC. (MESUFISH), A PART OF THE MESURADO GROUP OF COMPANIES, THE LARGEST ENTIRELY LIBERIAN-OWNED ENTERPRISE IN THE COUNTRY (PRESIDENT TOLBERT AND MEMBERS OF HIS FAMILY ARE PRINCIPAL SHAREHOLDERS), DOMINATES COMMERCIAL FISHING. MESUFISH, IN ASSOCIATION WITH CONTINENTAL SEAFOOD OF NEW JERSEY, OPERATES A FLEET OF APPROXIMATELY 30 VESSELS WHICH FISH PRIMARILY FOR SHRIMP. THE SHRIMP ARE PROCESSED, PACKAGED AND FROZEN BY MESUFISH AND SOLD TO CONTINENTAL SEAFOOD FOR EXPORT, THE U.S. BEING THE MAJOR MARKET. SHRIMP EXPORTS WERE VALUED AT APPROXIMATELY 2.8 MILLION DOLLARS IN 1976. VALUE OF EXPORTED SHRIMP IN 1977 IS ESTIMATED BY UNITED NATIONS FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION PLANNING ADVISOR TO BE 3.4 MILLION DOLLARS.

3. NEARLY ALL FISH CAUGHT BY MESUFISH'S SHRIMP FLEET ARE SOLD FOR LOCAL CONSUMPTION. THESE CATCHES AMOUNT TO ABOUT 1,500 TONS PER YEAR. MESUFISH ALSO IMPORTS AN ESTIMATED 13,500 TONS OF FROZEN FISH PER YEAR FOR LOCAL CONSUMPTION WHICH ARE PURCHASED FROM FOREIGN FLEETS, PRIMARILY SOVIET. ARTISANAL FISHERMEN, USING CANOES AND TRADITIONAL METHODS, LAND AN ADDITIONAL ESTIMATED 15,000 TONS OF FISH PER YEAR, ALL OF WHICH ARE FOR LOCAL CONSUMPTION.

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4. NO EXTENSIVE INVESTIGATION OF FISH STOCKS HAS BEEN DONE IN LIBERIAN WATERS. HOWEVER, THE GENERAL FEELING AMONG KNOWLEDGEABLE SOURCES IF THAT THERE IS CONSIDERABLE POTENTIAL FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF OFFSHORE FISHING. AN OFFER BY SOVIET RESEARCH VESSEL TO CONDUCT DURVEY FOR LIBERIA IN CONJUNCTION WITH FISHERIES INVESTIGATION BEING CONDUCTED ALONG ENTIRE WEST COAST OF AFRICA UNDER AUSPICES OF THE UNITED NATIONS WAS DECLINED. ACCORDING TO GENERAL MANAGER OF MESUFISH, IT WAS FEARED RESULTS OF RESEARCH MIGHT ENCOURAGE POACHING IN LIBERIAN WATERS BY SOVIETS. SOVIETS FOLLOWED UP ABOUT MARCH 1977 WITH OFFER TO DO RESEARCH AND PERFORM CONTRACT FISHING FOR MESUFISH, BUT NO AGREEMENT WAS REACHED. ROMANIAN RESEARCH VESSEL CURRENTLY WORKING WITH MESUFISH TO PERFORM FISHERIES RESOURCE SURVEY, AND ROMANIANS HAVE SEPARATELY MADE PROPOSAL TO GOL FOR FISHING AGREEMENT BETWEEN TWO GOVERNMENTS.

5. UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM'S FISHERY COMMITTEE FOR THE EASTERN CENTRAL ATLANTIC (CECAF) IS PROVIDING ASSISTANCE TO LIBERIA'S BUREAU OF FISHERIES IN PLANNING FURTHER FISHERIES DEVELOPMENT. RECOMMENDATIONS INCLUDE PROGRAMS TO ASSIST ARTISANAL FISHERMEN, TO DEVELOP COOPERATIVES FOR STORING AND MARKETING FISH, AND TO IMPROVE GATHERING OF STATISTICS FOR MANAGEMENT

OF FISH RESOURCES. CECAF HAS OFFERED TO PROVIDE SEVERAL SPECIALISTS TO ASSIST LIBERIA IN INAUGURATING THESE PROGRAMS.

6. MESUFISHNOW TAKING A STRONG INTEREST IN DEVELOPING ITS OWN SEPARATE FLEET OF VESSELS TO INCREASE FISH CATCHES AND WILL SOON TAKE DELIVERY OF THREE VESSELS RECENTLY PURCHASED IN THE U.S. TO BEGIN THAT FLEET. MESUFISH ALSO CURRENTLY CONSIDERING PLANS FOR ESTABLISHING A FISH PROCESSING PLANT, AS WELL AS EXPANSION OF ITS SHRIMP PROCESSING, DOCKING AND COLD STORAGE FACILITIES. FISH WILL CONTINUE TO BE MARKETED FROM COLD STORAGE FACILITIES IN MONROVIA AND FROM THE TWELVE COLD STORAGE DEPOTS SCATTERED THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY WHICH ARE SUPPLIED BY REFRIGERATED MESUFISH VEHICLES.

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7. AN ACT OF LEGISLATURE OF JANUARY 30, 1948, PROVIDES THE AUTHORITY FOR MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE'S BUREAU OF FISHERIES TO REGULATE FISHING IN LIBERIAN WATERS. TERRITORIAL SEA OF LIBERIA EXTENDS OUTWARD 200 NAUTICAL MILES. REGULATION OF FISHING INCLUDES LICENSING, REGISTRATION OF COMMERCIAL FISHING VESSELS AND GEAR, TIMELY REPORTS OF CATCHES, ETC., AND REQUIRES THAT NO LIBERIAN COMMERCIAL FISHING VESSEL BE REGISTERED WITHOUT LIBERIAN CITIZEN POSSESSING CONTROLLING INTEREST (51 PERCENT OR MORE). FURTHERMORE, VESSELS REGISTERED IN LIBERIA MUST BE PHYSICALLY BASED IN LIBERIA.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 MONROVIA 3071

8. NUMBER OF CANOES ESTIMATED TO BE INVOLVED IN COMMERCIAL
FISHING RANGES FROM 800-3,000, BUT ACTUAL NUMBER OF ARTISANAL
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FISHERMEN OPERATING IN LIBERIA IS NOT KNOWN. IN PRACTICE,
MANY FISHERMEN ARE NOT LICENSED, MANY VESSELS ARE NOT REGISTERED
AND STATISTICAL INFORMATION ON CATCHES IS WOEFULLY INCOMPLETE
AND INACCURATE.

9. IN ADDITION TO ROMANIAN FISHING PROPOSAL, SIERRA LEONE AND
LIBERIA HAVE DISCUSSED POSSIBILITY OF MUTUAL FISHING RIGHTS WHICH
ARE TO EVENTUALLY BECOME EFFECTIVE UNDER THE UMBRELLA OF THE
MANO RIVER UNION. LIBERIA HAS ALSO HELD TALKS WITH GOVERNMENTS
OF GUINEA AND IVORY COAST, BUT NO FIRM RESULTS TO DATE.

10. LIBERIAN COAST GUARD NOW HAS THREE VESSELS RANGING IN SIZE
FROM 42 TO 65 FEET. VESSELS ARE OFTEN NOT OPERATIONAL DUE TO
MAINTENANCE DIFFICULTIES. PATROLLING TENDS TO BE LIMITED TO
A SHORT DISTANCE OFFSHORE BECAUSE OF INEXPERIENCE OF CREWS. THE
FRENCH HAVE RECENTLY APPROACHED GOL IN AN EFFORT TO SELL THEM
20-METER PATROL BOATS FOR USE BY COAST GUARD. PURCHASE OF BOATS
BY GOL APPARENTLY ENCOURAGED BY MANAGING DIRECTOR OF MESURADO
GROUP OF COMPANIES, BUT GOL HAS NOT YET RESPONDED TO FRENCH
OFFER. ACCORDING TO PRESENT FUNDING PROJECTIONS, THE GOL WOULD
BE BUYING COAST GUARD PATROL VESSEL THROUGH FMS IN FY 1982,
EARLIER PURCHASE BEING LIMITED BY FUNDING CONSTRAINTS. THE
SUBJECT WAS DISCUSSED AT SOME LENGTH BY PRESIDENTS TOLBERT AND

CARTER IN MONROVIA ON APRIL 3.

11. SOVIETS, WHO HAVE AN AGREEMENT TO FISH IN NEIGHBORING SIERRA LEONE, HAVE BEEN SIGHTED POACHING IN LIBERIAN WATERS BUT HAVE ALWAYS "ESCAPED." VESSELS OF OTHER NATIONALITIES WHO OCCASIONALLY SELL TO MESUFISH ARE ALSO SUSPECTED OF POACHING, NOTABLY GREEK AND JAPANESE. LIBERIA'S COAST GUARD HAS IN PAST APPREHENDED AT LEAST TWO VESSELS FOR POACHING--ONE FROM IVORY COAST AND ONE FROM SIERRA LEONE. NO FINES WERE LEVIED AND VESSELS WERE EVENTUALLY RELEASED.

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12. SIERRA LEONE SEIZED AT LEAST THREE VESSELS OF MESUFISH'S LIBERIA-BASED FLEET IN DECEMBER 1976 FOR SISHING IN THEIR WATERS. IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE SEIZURES, PRESIDENT TOLBERT, BY EXECUTIVE ORDER, EXTENDED LIBERIA'S TERRITORIAL SEA FROM 12 TO 200 MILES IN APPARENT REACTION TO SEIZURES. IN FEBRUARY 1977 THE EXECUTIVE ORDER WAS ENACTED INTO LAW BY THE LIBERIAN LEGISLATURE. SINCE LIBERIA'S NORTHERN AND SOUTHERN FISHING GROUNDS OVERLAP NEIGHBOTS' TERRITORIAL WATERS, SOME LEVEL OF POACHING LIKELY TO CONTINUE WHETHER INTENDED OR NOT. BUREAU OF FISHERIES AND MESUFISH UNABLE TO ASSESS IMPACT OF POACHING ON FISH STOCKS AND OVERALL ECONOMY. DEGREE OF CONCERN SHOWN ON SUBJECT OF POACHING COULD BE CHARACTERIZED AS MILD TO MODERATE.

13. UNDER AUSPICES OF MANO RIVER UNION, TOPIC OF JOINT POLICING OF WATERS OF LIBERIA AND SIERRA LEONE HAS BEEN DISCUSSED, BUT IDEA REMAINS IN PROPOSAL STAGE.

14. DESPITE DISCUSSIONS GOL MAY HAVE HAD WITH ITS NEIGHBORS, IT IS OUR ASSESSMENT BASED PARTYLY ON CONVERSATIONS WITH GOL OFFICIALS, INCLUDING THE PRESIDENT, THAT LIBERIA WOULD NOT VIEW JOINT POLICING AS A SUBSTITUTE FOR ENHANCING ITS OWN PATROL CAPABILITIES.

CARTER

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: FISHERIES, EXPORTS, TERRITORIAL WATERS, LAW OF THE SEA
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 27 apr 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978MONROV03071
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780180-0011
Format: TEL
From: MONROVIA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780410/aaaaahxy.tel
Line Count: 265
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: d442b2a5-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 STATE 90967
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 19 apr 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2815330
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: ABILITY OF WEST AFRICAN COASTAL STATES TO PATROL OFF- SHORE FISHERIES
TAGS: EFIS, EWWT, MARR, MASS, PARM, PBOR, PLOS, LI, MESUFISH
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/d442b2a5-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014